

# Camas

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## Camas, Fall 2004

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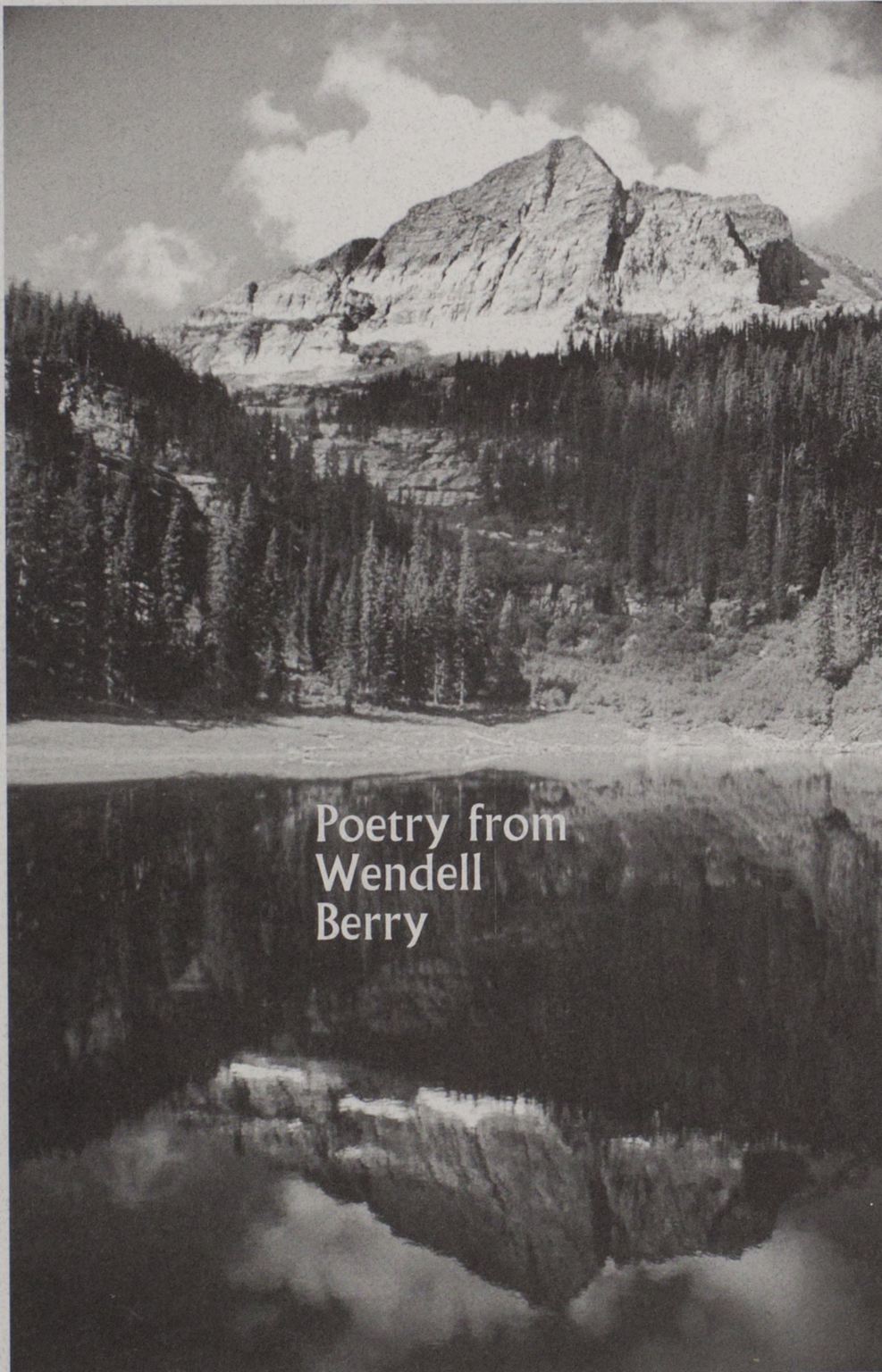


# Camas

The Nature of the West

Featuring

New  
fiction  
from  
David  
James  
Duncan



Poetry from  
Wendell  
Berry

Essays  
from

Susan  
Marsh and  
Robin  
Patten

fall 2004

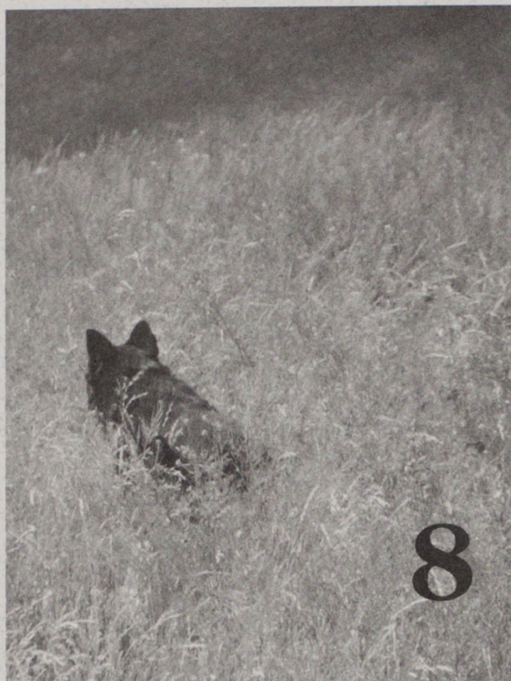
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# The Teller Issue

Fall 2004



"Yes, Romeo was just a dog. But for seventeen years he watched over Jamey's erratic incarnation with keenest interest, yet without judgment—as poor old Jesus once recommended to us all."



"Stars whirling in my head, flames like arrows from the heavens, forty days and forty nights, draw slowly, creep in moments between autumn butterflies and dying bees."

Cover photo by Josh Burnim

## Features

"Romeo Shows Jamey the Door"

By David James Duncan

page 8

"Most of All, the Quiet"

By Susan Marsh

page 20

"In the Neighborhood of Wolves"

By Robin Patten

page 34

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## Departments

FIRST PERSON

Ryan Newhouse

Page 6

HUCKLEBERRY WINE

News and Ideas

Page 7

POETRY

Wendell Berry

Pages 16 and 39

Kathleen Yale

Page 32

Peter Nash

Page 38

PHOTO ESSAY

Chris Chapman and James Chapman

Page 26

LAST WORDS

Laura A. Munson

Page 40



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Thanks also to our hard-working staff members; their enthusiasm and creativity are greatly appreciated.

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Abby Berenbak





Darren Grayaz

**Wendell Berry** lives and writes in Kentucky. He has published numerous novels, essays, and books of poetry. He has taught at the Environmental Writing Institute at Teller Wildlife Refuge twice.

Writer/poet **James Chapman** moved to Montana from the Midwest flatlands in summer of 1994. He has worked as a cabin builder, tree planter, forest firefighter and cartographer, and he has spent several seasons as a fire lookout. His writing explores various genres including fiction, poetry, non-fiction essays, screenwriting and children's books.

**David James Duncan's** books include *The River Why*, *The Brothers K*, *River Teeth*, and *My Story As Told By Water*. He lives with his family on a small trout stream in western Montana.

**Susan Marsh** lives in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Her work has appeared in *Orion*, *Northern Lights*, *Petroglyph*, *North American Review*, *Bugle*, *American Nature Writing*, and *Talking River Review*, and has been anthologized in collections including *The Mountain Reader*, *Ring of Fire*, *The Leap Years*, *Women Runners*, and *Going Alone*. Her books include *A Visitor's Guide to the Wyoming Range* (Grand Teton Natural History Association, 1995), *Beyond the Tetons* (White Willow, 1999), and *Stories of the Wild*, (The Murie Center, 2001). She is the winner of the 2003 Neltje Blanchan Memorial Award, awarded by the Wyoming Arts Council for literature inspired by the natural world.

**Laura A. Munson** lives with her family in Whitefish, Montana, where she writes novels, personal essays and short stories. She is currently trying to publish a collection of essays about finding home—both interior and exterior, in the rural West called, "Break Me in, Montana."

**Peter Nash** lives in rural Northern California. After working most of his life as a physician, he now writes poetry, works in his garden, takes walks along the river and drives the country roads with his two dogs Henry and Zoe.

**Robin Patten** is an ecologist and naturalist. She received an M.S. in Botany from the University of Wyoming in 1987 and a Ph.D. in ecology from Colorado State University in 1991. After finishing her graduate studies she returned home to south-central Montana for post-doctoral work at Montana State University, focusing on large-scale vegetation patterns of the Yellowstone Ecosystem. Most recently she has taken time off to travel and write, and is now living at the family ranch.

**Katie Yale** is a graduate student in UM's Environmental Studies Program emphasizing in writing. She has spent the last several years following wild animals around Western Montana under the guise of a wildlife biologist, and poking around in the woods.



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## first person

Dear Reader,

I can always tell if it has been a long time since I last fished. A long time, to me, is more than two weeks. When I return to the rivers after being away I am quickly reminded of that which intrigues me about fishing—the way it teaches me patience.

My lesson begins the same way every time. It begins with tying a simple knot. I can control my excitement to find good water and cast a line. Impatience does not grow in me by wishing a trout would rise. These are the easy parts. However, when the first three knots I tie all break after giving them a tug with my hand, I know my lesson has started. I have cursed more faulty knots than missed fish.

As a child, I left the lure changes and bait-rigging to my father. On the early mornings that he would take me fishing, I was the first out of the car and the first standing at the water's edge. Fifteen minutes later I would be presented with my rod and reel, baited and ready to cast. I never heard my father complain about this chore I had bestowed on him. Of course, he had taught me to tie the fisherman's knot, as he learned it from his father, who learned it from his father, following back to my eel-fishing ancestors on Long Island.

But there was security in knowing that my father had tied the knot that held my line to the lure, and in turn would hold any fish that chose to strike. My reliance on his knots also kept me fishing near his side. If I needed a new hook I wouldn't have far to go. As I grew older,

however, and with my father's soft encouragement that I was an able fisherman, I began to trust my own knots, and eventually I began fishing alone.

Now I value the chance to fish alone, to be waist-deep in the Blackfoot river tying on my smallest Elk Hair Caddis. The way I know patience is by tying my own knots. If I can get through that part alone, I know I have been a good student.

In this issue of *Camas*, the last of the Teller issues, I am pleased to offer the works from writers and students who participated in this year's Environmental Writing Institute at the

Teller Wildlife Refuge, taught by David James Duncan. This issue's feature essays speak directly to lessons learned, and all of the works consider the values of patience and profundity of contemplation. In David James Duncan's work of fiction, previously

unpublished, he explores what lesson a dog can teach his master. In Susan Marsh's piece, "Most of All, the Quiet," she sorts out the places, and sounds, that offer her meaning. Robin Patten's account of neighboring wolves offers solace that knowing does not always equal knowledge.

Consider each of these pieces, especially the poetry included by Wendell Berry, to be finely crafted knots by well-practiced tyers. I hope you enjoy them.

In Peace and Conservation,  
Ryan Newhouse  
Editor, Fall 2004

Chris Chapman





# Huckleberry Wine

from montana's  
mountains to your table

IN MEMORIAM  
ELLEN MELOY  
1946-2004

Gray day in Missoula.

November 2004. In the EVST seminar room in Rankin Hall, black binders hold the hard work of so many alumni. But today, pick only one up—in 1979, Ellen Ditzler completed her MStThesis in EVST: “Song Dog,” a personal, cultural, and scientific meditation on the coyote. Early on, this sentence: “It is my firm belief that outward advocacy and action backed by research and fact are ineffective without inner visions, convictions and creative thinking.”

In the quarter century since, Ellen moved to Helena, married Mark Meloy, and found her true home in the deserts and the rivers of southern Utah. As Ellen Meloy, her words unwound and found

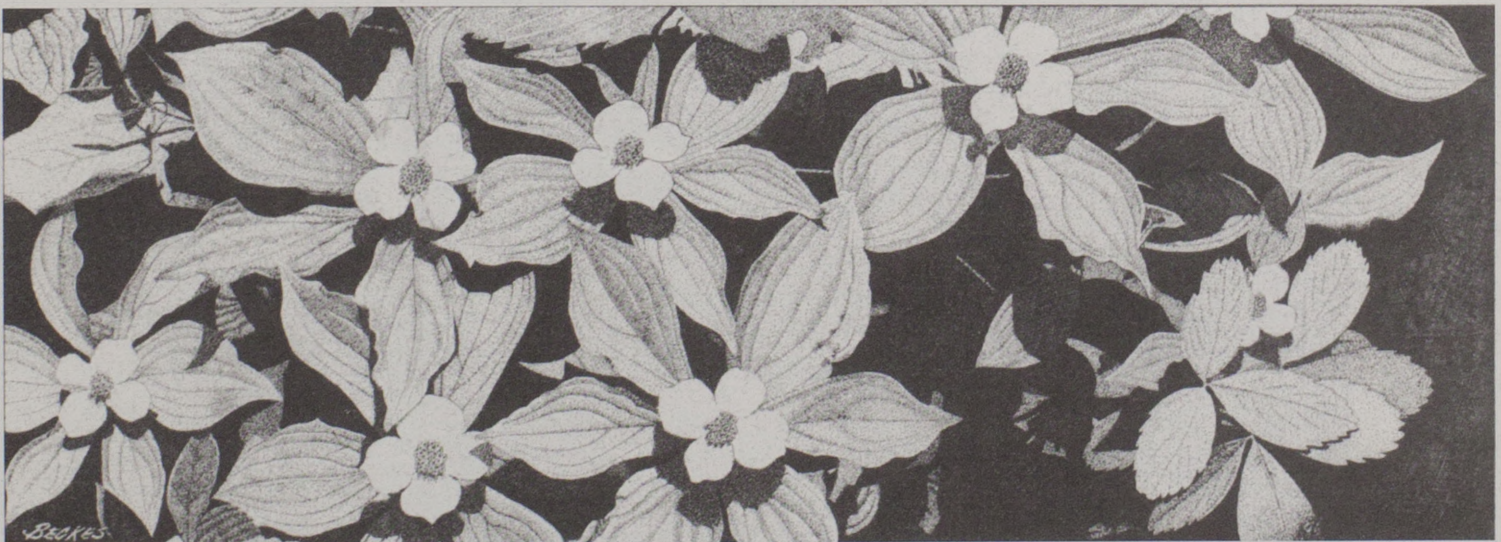
their way across the world like any fine river: *Raven's Exile*, *The Last Cheater's Waltz*, *The Anthropology of Turquoise*. A Whiting Award, a Utah Book Award, a Pulitzer Nomination.

Ellen Meloy died November 4, 2004, at her home in Bluff, Utah. All of us at *Camas* send our deep condolences to her husband, family, and close friends. We offer our sense of loss for her as a person and as a strong voice for the wild and natural. Her last book, *Eating Stone*, is due out next year. Introducing her “Song Dog,” she forecast so much else: “In the spirit of coyote storytelling, I created a few tales of my own.” Thanks for the spirit. Thanks for the tales.

-Phil Condon

We at Camas  
would like to hear  
from you

Traditionally, Huckleberry Wine has been reserved for environmental news. Although we will still be printing relevant news-related pieces, we would also like to hear from our readers. Do you have something to say about what you have read in *Camas*? What is going on in your area? Have you read a good book on the environment and want to share your thoughts? We value your opinions about our publication. We will select various letters and print them in our next issue of *Camas*. Please mail letters to: Camas Editor  
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Eugene Beckes



# "Romeo Shows Jamey

By David James Duncan

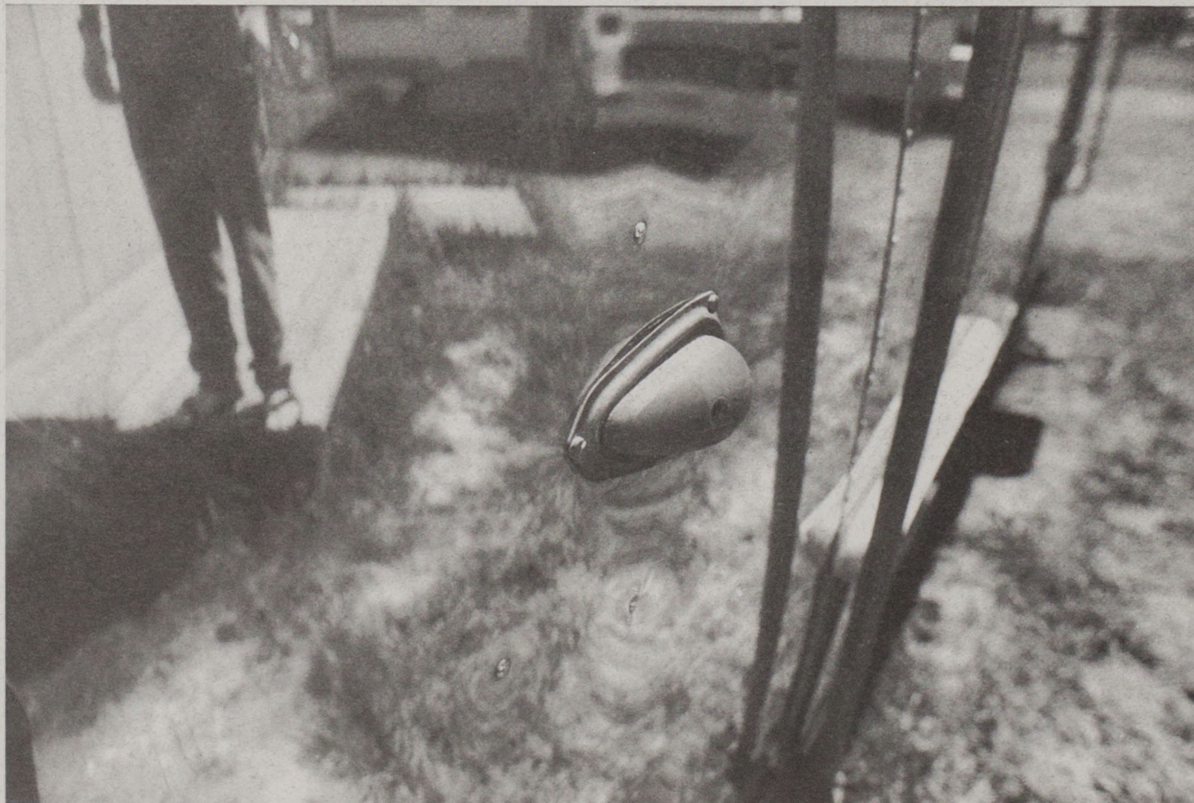
*"Love, and a bit with a dog.  
That's what they want."*

— The theatre manager,  
"Shakespeare in Love"

On March 1st, 2000, the Portland actor and playwright, Jamey Van Zandt, held his best friend in his arms, nodded to the doctor standing over them, then watched that doctor, in obedience to his nod, end his friend's life via lethal injection. This world being a cauldron of war, violent separation, murder, injury, and suffering, it's anticlimactic to admit that this friend was just a black-and-tan border collie named Romeo. But it's true. Jamey loved a lot of people a little, and a few people a lot, but in duration of intimacy he'd been closer to Romeo than to any human he'd ever lived with, and

even in *degree* of intimacy he'd been closer to Romeo than to anyone but his wife, Risa. Romeo spent seventeen years glued to Jamey's side; seventeen years incessantly and nonjudgmentally imbibing his master's most intimate moods and odors; seventeen years jumping up out of sleep just to dog Jamey's random pacing during wee hour insomnia attacks. Risa and Jamey were close but not the way Romeo and Jamey were. Risa did not spend her formative years sleeping on Jamey's feet. When Jamey was attending college classes she did not lie upon his rancid old tennis shoe in the hall outside because that shoe was the one thing on earth that would keep her from howling. She did not insist, every morning for seventeen years, on following Jamey to lie outside the locked bathroom as he moved his bowels. Nor did she greet him, when he opened the door—greet him *thousands of times in a row*—with grins and tail wags of such ecstatically congratulatory delight that Jamey by God came to feel he really *had* accomplished something wonderful in there.

For seventeen years Romeo shared his master's solitudes and social chaos, his inertias and manias,



Chris Chapman



# the Door "

his voluntary maledictions, involuntary prayers, soliloquies, rants, his best, his worst, his everything. These two were no duo. They were a six-legged man/dog unit so incessantly linked that most people who met them found them absurd at first, but after years would pass and they'd bump into the Jamey/Romeo Unit again, something would flip like an egg over easy inside lots of them, and the absurd would become the Exemplary. Yes, Romeo was just a dog. But for seventeen years he watched over Jamey's erratic incarnation with keenest interest, yet without judgment—as poor old Jesus once recommended to us all. Romeo's love for his master came within a single condition of attaining that godlike level known as "unconditional." What's more, the sole condition to Romeo's love was simply his wish that Jamey would never leave his sight.

So that's who, on March 1st, 2000, Jamey held in his arms.

That's whose brown eyes he gazed into, then turned from, to nod to the doctor.

That was the life, the friend, the part of himself, he then allowed to be killed by lethal injection.

The adventures of the six-legged Jamey/Romeo Unit would fill a thousand pages, but only one such adventure funnels into the mystery I want to ponder here. It concerns a door.

In the 41st chapter of *Job*, the poet, in pondering the Almighty, asks:

*"Who can open the doors of His face?"*

My favorite response to this is Emerson's: *"There is a crack in everything God has made."*

As his parting gift to his friend and master, Romeo showed Jamey just such a crack. It was the very crack, Jamey further believes, that serves the soul as door, offering a deathless exit out of the otherwise airtight world in which God has fatally encased us.

Unlike his wife, Risa, Jamey is no mystic. There is, he insists, no woowoo in his experience. He says that Romeo, as a parting gift, answered *Job 41's* question by literally opening a door in this world's face and showing Jamey a way out. "This door was palpable," he says. "It was physical. I heard and felt it. It was real."

To preface the door, all that really need be said is that for seventeen years Romeo and Jamey comprised a comic yet beautiful Union, but that somehow, Jamey never could quite understand it, Romeo grew old while Jamey did not, despite their beautiful Union. The dog's teeth became useless nubs. His sight and hearing faded. His sleek fur grew drab and, to put it modestly, "doggy-smelling." Chronic arthritis turned his front paws into something more like flippers. The drugs for the arthritis attacked and weakened his heart.

There is a sidehill yard, with a large cement goldfish pond, behind Risa and Jamey's Northwest Portland apartment house. In exchange for maintaining this pond and yard, Jamey purchased lavatorial and exercise rights for Romeo in the azaleas above the pond. One frigid winter morning Jamey let the dog out to use his beshrubbed "bathroom," whistled for him a half hour later, then walked out to see why the dog didn't come. He found that Romeo's hips had collapsed, sending him sideways down the little hill into the ice-rimmed pond, where he now stood, submerged to the neck, too arthritic to climb out. But because Jamey had long ago forbade Romeo to bark in the morning, lest he wake all the neighbors, the dog remained silent. Unable to move, dying of hypothermia, he would have stood in the icewater, refusing to break his master's command till his spirit left him.

"Tell me of a higher love when you hear of one," Nervous Jervis said to Risa later.

"God, backwards," Jervis said. "It's no accident the way we spell this animal's name."

Within two days of the fishpond episode Romeo developed a sinus infection that grew chronic. The recommended drugs didn't cure the infection, but they did make Romeo incontinent. Mortification at every indoor mistake was now as palpable in his eyes as his love. He began to sneeze, convulsively, trying to clear the infected sinuses, but his arthritis had destroyed his ability to control the sneezes, so he'd accidentally smash his muzzle on the floor, giving himself profuse nose-bleeds. These too mortified him. The pawprints Risa and Jamey would find when they'd get home from work showed how Romeo hobbled round and round the



apartment, trying between sneezes to lick up all the blood he kept spilling.

This downward spiral went on for months. Risa was a saint about it, never once suggesting the dog be put down. She told Jamey, "We've been together four years. You and Romeo have been together seventeen. He's your call."

In marriage, though, nothing belongs to just one person. Jamey did all the clean-up when he was home, but when he was away, Risa cleaned up after every incontinence without complaint.

The beginning of the end did not come until Risa and Jamey's fifteen-month-old daughter, Lilly, was given one of those leg-propelled bumper-car-like contraptions toddlers use to learn to walk. Lilly quickly grew adept at it. She then grew downright reckless and fast. One day she rammed the device into a deep-asleep Romeo. He lurched up and grabbed her shin. Just his warning grab. But one old fang, broken off to a point years before, pierced Lilly and drew blood. Even then, Risa made no ultimatums. But Romeo himself was so mortified that, afterward, he refused for weeks to leave the big tuba-case Jamey had long ago turned into his bed.

The time had come. As Romeo's namesake finally put it,

*Let me have a dram of poison, such soon-speeding gear  
As will disperse itself through all the veins  
That the life-weary taker may fall dead,  
And that the trunk may be discharged of breath*

*As violently as hasty powder fired  
Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb..."*

In the tiny Oregon Coast town of Hebo, a college pal of Risa's—a laconic Chinese-American named

Gai Li—was the practicing large animal vet. Three weeks after the bite, seeing Romeo still in his bed, Jamey quietly asked Risa to phone Gai.

Gai told her, "Have Jamey bring the dog before we open at eight tomorrow."

Jamey chose Gai and the Coast for a reason. An hour south of Hebo, a storm-smashed, basaltic headland juts out into the Pacific. This was the place where Jamey and his sister, Judith, had scattered their mother's ashes when they were five and seven

years old. Jamey and Romeo had hiked the headland every summer for seventeen years. The most beautiful, haunted place he knew was the only place Jamey could imagine leaving this dog behind for good.

At 4:30 a.m., March 1st, Jamey slipped a fold-up Army shovel into the bed of his Toyota truck, loaded the tube-case dog-bed, then whistled for his dog.

When Romeo came prancing, eagerly and at once, Saint Risa finally lost it.

Her sobs, as she hugged Romeo goodbye, made him feel confused and guilty.

Which made Risa sob harder. "It's not your fault, it's not your fault!" she kept gasping.

Which made Lilly start to cry.

Which made Romeo look as if even he were crying.

Which made Lilly start to laugh.

Which cheered Risa and Romeo back up.

Jamey picked Romeo up quickly, set him on the front passenger seat, and drove away fast while it still seemed remotely possible.

As Romeo rode toward the Coast in his old shotgun position, he seemed to grow younger by the mile. Risa had displaced him in this seat of honor



Abby Berenbak



years ago. Much as he loved Risa, he now resumed his old place with a look of smug vindication.

They reached Hebo in three hours. Jamey located the Large Animal Clinic then drove, as prearranged, around back, parking in a spruce-lined, mist-shrouded meadow.

Romeo took one look at the meadow and began blissfully panting in anticipation of a hike.

Then Gai Li stepped out the back door, "drams" and "soon-speeding gear" at the ready.

Romeo's pant changed to one of fear. Though he'd never set eyes on Gai, he recognized Risa's friend at once for what he was: a damned animal doctor. Jamey felt sick, as Gai approached, to think that Romeo's distrust of vets had been prophetic all along. But mortality was not the source of Romeo's fear at all. Veterinarians had twice saved his life—once from salmon fever, once from a strychnine-laced deer carcass. But in so doing they had both committed the one unforgivable sin: they'd separated Romeo from his master.

Fear lent Romeo its strange strength. While Jamey greeted and thanked Gai, and paid him in advance, the dog trotted off across the meadow to a huge Sitka spruce, did his spryest leglift in years, then beamed his inimitable smile back at Jamey as if to say, *See? Limber as can be! Strong stream! Pleasant-smelling, too! No need for vets! I'm fine and dandy.*

Jamey wished Romeo would just wander into the mist, leaving him with this image forever.

Wishing accomplished the usual nothing. And when the dog cantered back to Jamey, his tail now wagging despite the presence of Gai, Jamey grew so nauseous with the sense of betrayal that he half collapsed into the wet grass.

While Gai watched in silence, Jamey gruffly ordered Romeo to lie down beside him.

Romeo hadn't disobeyed Jamey yet. Turned out he never would.

Jamey slid Romeo's body—suddenly old and painfully knotted again—onto his lap.

The dog panted hard, kept an eye on Gai, but tried to smile up at Jamey, too, grateful for this awkward but rare intimacy.

Gai said, "Ready?"

Jamey clamped a hand round Romeo's muzzle to prevent a bite.

Gai slipped a tourniquet around Romeo's foreleg, located a vein, produced the sedative syringe from his white labcoat pocket, calmly remarked, "This

was the relaxer," and drove the fluid into Romeo's bloodstream before Jamey or Romeo could fully take it in.

An instant later the fatal syringe was in Gai's hand, already poised.

Loathing the man's efficiency, but recognizing the desperate lateness of his and Romeo's united, six-legged life, Jamey gazed down into the dog's brown eyes, put his theatrical training fiercely to work, drove Gai from his mind, and made Romeo alone his focus.

He couldn't bear to say, "It's gonna be all right." He couldn't bear to say anything. But as he gazed at Romeo the words *unforgivable mercy* floated into his head and stayed there. An odd-sounding concept. Yet there it lay in his lap, still adoring him, still beautiful despite his fear.

Gai glanced the final question.

Romeo panted hard, but kept his eyes locked on Jamey's.

Without a glance at Gai, staying faithful to their eyelock, Jamey nodded.

In went the syringe.

Actor that he was, Jamey's calm appeared perfect as he asked, "Will it be fast?" But when Gai answered, "Very," something amorphous and black rose up in Jamey's chest and flopped over in a spilled heap. And whatever that black thing is, Jamey says, it'll never leave. He says it's flopped over and spilled in him, still.

Yet Romeo kept on panting. *He kept on panting!* Jamey tried not to run with this; tried not to pray that Gai had underdosed him, maybe grabbed the wrong syringe; tried not to picture himself saying, "Well, we gave it a shot, Romeo, but fuck this! Let's go home!"

Gai even began, to Jamey's joy, to look slightly panicked.

Then came the snap.

Jamey felt it throughout Romeo's body.

And that's what the snap made of him: a body: a dog no more.

But a split second, split eternity, split hair after the snap, or maybe simultaneous to the snap but *deep inside it*, Jamey felt something in the air and atoms that comprise the very wall of this world: felt it with his whole being, including body and mind.

*Who can open the doors of His face?* asks the Job poet. But the question is rhetorical—a faith statement in disguise. The poet is certain that the answer is an



awed: "No one."

Yet at the instant of death, instant of the snap, Romeo, Jamey, and a third body they'd built through seventeen years of intimacy, discovered something. Simultaneous to the nervous system recoil that ended their united life, Jamey felt a perfectly crafted, airtight, door open,

felt his closest friend shoot silently through,  
felt the door close,

*tk!*

felt the slight suction of its closing.

And Jamey was transported; mesmerized; enthralled. What struck him first, about this door, was its perfect minimalist beauty. What he glimpsed as Romeo left was the most exquisitely crafted device imaginable. He felt this in part because *there was nothing to it*. Death's door, as he experienced his beloved dog darting through it, is the handiwork of an aesthetic so sublimely minimal that the artifact supposedly created by it—death itself—isn't even there! The body had been abandoned in a split second. The body remained. But it was now dead matter. The *being* was gone. Gone with a minimalist ease that left it *intact*.

*tk!*

Gone into a what? Who knew exactly? Legends abounded—and he would reread them all with a open mind now. In defiance of every expectation he'd had, the shooting away of Romeo's intact life hit Jamey as *a perfect work of the Unseen's art*. To feel the opening and closing of the invisible door was to touch the very carpentry of the Invisible. Nothing to see. Nothing to hold onto afterward but an emptied dog. Yet Jamey was left, after the *tk!* and tiny suction, with an overpowering sense that his dog had indeed been emptied, that the being he loved had palpably departed, and that this world was no longer the *only* world: it was one of a now-accessible two: the darker, sadder one, with singing thrushes, cold mist, and beautiful, shaggy old trees in it.

Gazing at the trees—gazing at the very spruce Romeo's blithe piss still warmed—Jamey's jaw went slack and he was a child again, hunched on a rug with his sister Jude, looking at their dead mother's elaborate old wooden advent calendar, with twenty-five camouflaged Countdown doors hiding an ever-greater gift behind each door. Staring at the spruce, the meadow, the mist between, Jamey felt the gift he'd called Romeo

hovering behind an advent wall of trees and water vapor, intact in every way that counted, sending the *feeling* of his hidden smile back through the door to Jamey. And the solaces grew so vast they defeated grief. Though he held his best friend's emptied body in his lap, Jamey was awash in the same pure wonder he'd felt when Lilly, fully formed and perfect, slid into this world from a realm whose advent door had, preposterously, been Risa. He hadn't understood then. He didn't understand now. He just knew, without understanding, that the darting of Romeo's life out of the matter of this world, the darting called 'death,' was not the opposite of Lilly's birth, but its twin. Romeo felt no more 'terminated', at this moment, than Lilly had felt nonexistent in the moments before her birth. The dog simply flashed from this world into another the way their baby slid from another into this.

"I'll leave you now," a somber voice suddenly announced.

Gai. Poor Gai Li! His face as sad as Jamey's was awestruck. "I'm very sorry," he murmured as he turned and trudged heavily toward the clinic.

Jaw still slack, breathing stopped, Jamey watched the clinic's heavy metal door open, watched Gai step through, watched it close, *tk!*, and felt the defeat of death so strongly that it suddenly seemed so wrong not to share this stupendous intuition. So he started to stand. He started to lay aside Romeo's now-meaningless body in order to rush to the clinic door, pound on it, call Gai back, and tell him the news: *No grief, Gai! No sorrow! Romeo's shown me the door!*

But as he was lifting the body aside, Jamey's mind finally registered and filed the data that his hands had been gathering for some time—and this data knocked his grieflessness for a loop. Death, his hands had been silently telling him, had cured Romeo's abandoned body of arthritis in an instant. The dog's limbs and torso, twisted and pain-flexed for years, were suddenly as loose and lithe as they had been in his prime.

*His departure through the perfect door did this!* Jamey thought at first. *Even the body he abandoned was healed by it!*

Jamey truly felt this.

For a moment.

But that same sudden youthfulness of body—that liveness draped so languidly across his thighs—created in Jamey a conflictingly strong desire for the physical prime that once went with the liveness.



And with this desire, everything went to shit.

Exploring Romeo's corpse with his hands, struck drunk by its sudden youthfulness, Jamey underwent total eclipse. His effortless acceptance vanished. The sense of a sublimely minimalist art vanished. The Advent Invisibles vanished. Jamey now craved not the immortality that love had let him touch, but a Pharaoh-like immortality of body for an aged dog's corpse. Rather than let noble carbon compounds break down and become available to new life, Jamey began to curse the compounds' Maker as a murderer.

The sense of two worlds vanished. There was one world now, and it was as gray, mean, and lethal as ever. Letting his hands drink the dead dog's "tragic liveness," Jamey felt a tear start down his cheek. For some reason this tear made him feel he could see himself from high overhead, seated alone in the shrouded meadow far below.

He thought: *Alone... No more Romeo.... Tears threading down his cheeks...*

Somehow this image was good for a sudden sob.

Then came random scraps of soliloquy:

*O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick...*

*Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,*

*I enforce thy rotten jaws to open!*

And once the mortal self-pity and

Shakespearian shinola started to fly,

*Never was a story of more woe than this of Jamey and Romeo!*

His mind burst open like a piñata, out the sobs and verbiage poured and out they kept pouring. Garbage grief for Romeo, garbage grief for Mother, garbage grief for "this dying Earth," "my mortal love, Risa," "our poor doomed Lilly," and every other God-doomed God-damned cliché he could conjure. A flood of tears, flood of snot, flood of sounds he'd never made in his life rose from his lungs and belly, and Jamey worshipped at the altar of his own spewing sounds. Forgetting rather than guarding the *tk!*, spurning the secrets Romeo died to show him, he pulled the lithe corpse to his chest, imagined it the entire dog, gathered this false entirety up in his arms, staggered to his truck, lay Romeo's rapidly cooling head in his lap, sobbed at the speed of this temperature change, and drove, blubbing all the way, through the mist, birds and trees, till he reached the grassy, windy headland that housed his last bitter memories of a mother's ashes blown by that bastard, God, from the intended ocean she had loved back into her own lost children's eyes.

It gets worse. I'll fast forward.

Jamey placed Romeo's body in the tuba case bed, lay the folding shovel on top of it, shut the case, staggered up the headland to a mawkishly poetic old cedar tree, and began digging a hole at the tree's base.

Big mistake. Cedar trees have amazingly broad, tough root systems. By the time the hole was two feet deep, Jamey was exhausted from hacking at roots with the tiny shovel and had raised and burst bloody blisters on both palms. He'd planned with all his heart to bury Romeo in his beloved tuba-case. He'd imagined a very deep hole, a very buried case, and a canine Captain Nemo looking out from down there forever. But the hole wasn't a third the size required when Jamey's palms began bleeding. So he had to keep the tuba case.

"Another betrayal!" he groaned, thinking of Gai's hired syringe as the first—though the only betrayals so far were of a *tk!* and an invisible door.

Angrily lifting the body from the case, he lay it in the hole's shallow bottom, then curled it exactly the way Romeo used to curl himself for sleep. Upon inspecting this lay-out, Jamey noticed that Romeo's



Abby Berenbak



eyes had either come open or had never closed, and that the cataracts that blurred his vision prevented death from altering his gaze: the dog seemed to be regarding Jamey the same way he'd always regarded him.

Jamey reached into the hole and closed the eyes.

They reopened.

He reached down and closed them again.

They reopened.

Feeling the dog was doing it on purpose, feeling this was all because of him keeping the dog's tuba case, Jamey sobbed that he was sorry, showed the corpse his wrecked palms, and cried, "See? I'm sorry! But this is how it's gotta be."

The cloudy eyes just kept staring.

Fuck.

Time to start shoveling dirt. But throwing dirt onto Romeo's body and into his open, seemingly disapproving eyes is a big problem for a man who's decided to worship physical eyes and bodies rather than minimalist art and mystery. The only way Jamey could bear to do this burial, he decided, was to say "I love you" with each shovelful of dirt.

He set to work. The job required hundreds of shovelfuls. Jamey said it and said it—"I love you I love you I love you" till the words became sheer vacuous drivel.

Sensing utter wrongness of perspective, sweating a full-on theatrical flop-sweat, Jamey shoveled and said *I love you* in a frenzy. When he ran out of gas, he saw he'd buried the troublesome eyes, tan eyebrows, black body, weathered paws, regal tail, wrecked teeth, ragged pads, sheathed penis, unforgettable coat and liteness so inattentively that his

greatest longing, now, was to dig Romeo back up again, remember what he looked like, and rebury him again more mindfully.

But his palms had begun to resemble Christ's. Mindless burial would have to do.

Hoping to make up for every "betrayal" and mistake so far, Jamey ended the rite on his strong suit: a burst of language. Every word he spoke was

from the mind of the Elizabethan genius that had helped bring him this wonderful dog. Every word he spoke had once smoked audiences from the Ashland stage.

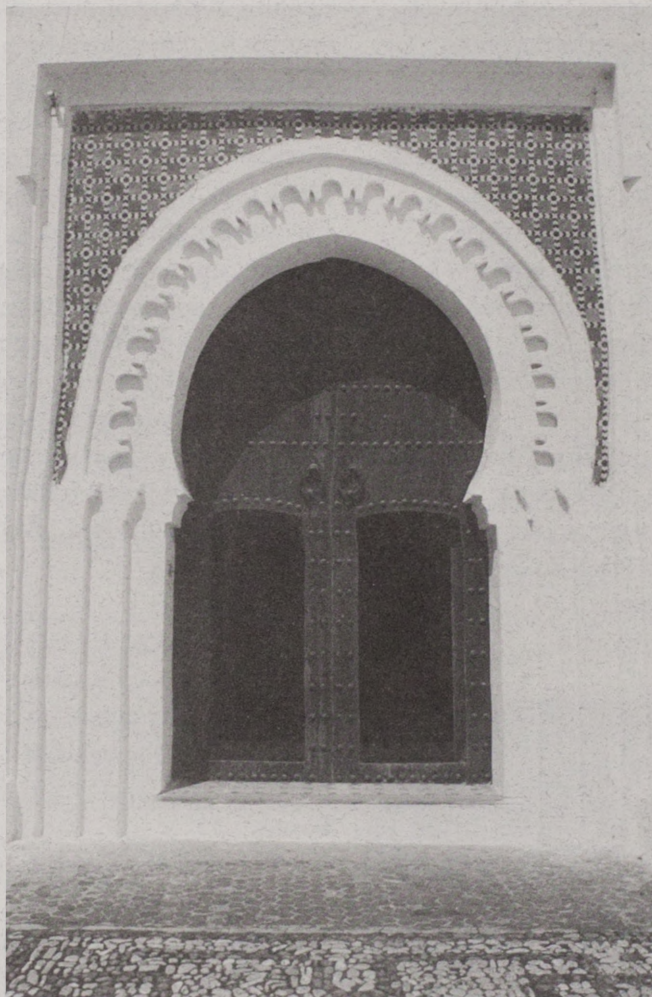
But there by the empty tuba case, the vanished dog, the strange old tree, even Shakespeare fell like gibberish from Jamey's lips, traveling nowhere, touching nothing, burying his best-ever friend's remains as incompetently and completely as his family had buried his Pacific-loving mother when the onshore wind stopped every ash of her from ever again touching the sea.

By the time he and the empty tuba case hit

the highway back to Portland, Jamey was so full of self-loathing that he stopped at every tavern en route and downed a pint in each.

Four hours and six taverns later he arrived home stinking drunk, kissed Lilly, who said, "Eeeuuuuu!", hugged Risa, who said, "You reek," then stepped, fully clothed, into the shower, where he slumped to the floor, muttered furiously for awhile, then passed out or fell to sleep—till the hot water ran out. He then stayed where he was for another quarter hour, letting the frigid water sober him, then chill him, then turn him hypothermic.

It was Risa who finally opened the shower door and shut off the water.



Abby Berenbak



"Is this a suicide attempt?" she asked.

But then she saw that something was going on. The drunkenness was gone. And despite the banging teeth, spasms of shivering, the prisoner-like crouching in a tile corner, Jamey was gazing at her with a look of clear-eyed awe.

"*Wuh*-would you *cuh*-close, then *ope-ope*-open the *shuh*-shower *duh*-door again, *puh-puh*-please?" he whispered.

As Risa reached out to oblige, she saw Jamey cock his head to carefully listen.

When she closed the thin glass door, the entire room reverberated in tympanic thump. But when she reopened it gently, the tiny plastic latch made an even tinier, *tk!*, after which Risa found Jamey staring, open-mouthed, at the air molecules through which the sound had come.

"*Puh-puh-puh-perfect!*" he whispered.

Shaking her head, Risa reached down and pulled him to his feet.

"*Suh*-something im-*puh*-possible happened today," he said fiercely.

"You don't say," Risa remarked with feigned disinterest. She steadied Jamey against the tiled corner, then started pulling off his soaked jacket, his shirt, his t-shirt, his sopped shoes.

"*Ruh-ruh*-Romeo *shuh*-showed me a *duh*-door," he said, and the tone had now shifted to reverence. "The most *buh-buh*-beautiful *duh*-door!"

"*Thuh*-that's juh-just guh-guh-guh-guh *great*, juh-Jamey," Risa teased, now peeling off his sopped socks, his jeans, his undershorts.

"*Suh-suh-suh*-seventeen *yuh*-years my *ruh*-Romeo *suh*-spent, *buh-buh-buh*-building the *buh*-bond that *luh*-led to that *tuh-tuh-tuh*-tiny *tk!*"

"The *tuh-tuh* tiny *what?*" Risa asked.

Jamey reached behind her, and closed the two of them in the shower stall. She began to think sexual thoughts. That'd be one way to warm him.

But with the wide-eyed expression of a toddler on Christmas morning, all Jamey did was gently push the door open.

*Tk!* said the plastic latch.

"The most *buh*-beautiful sound I ever *fu*-felt or *huh*-heard!" he gasped. Then his face clouded like a toddler's. "And I *buh*-betrayed it! And *ruh-ruh*-Romeo with it!"

Risa was gentle as she wrapped his shoulders in a towel. "You're way out there, my love," she said. "I shoulda come. You were brave to take this on alone. But it had to be done."

"*Nuh-nuh*-not the *betrayal!*" Jamey roared. "There was no *cuh*-call for the *guh*-God *duh*-damned *betrayal!*"

Holding him at arm's length, Risa studied Jamey's angry yet lost yet determined face, but couldn't read it. Something big had happened, she could tell. Something to do with a ticking or clicking door. But she could also tell no cogent account would be forthcoming tonight.

"*Thuh*-this *duh*-*duh*-day has *chuh*-changed me!" Jamey said as ferociously as banging teeth would allow.

"I noticed," she said, glancing at his middle. "Turned you into a Tinker Toy."

But he was not to be distracted. "It's *chuh*-changed me, *yuh*-you'll see! I *vuh-vuh-vuh*-vow, as of *thuh*-this *muh*-moment, *ruh*-Risa, to *suh*-stop *buh-buh*-betraying the Unseen."

Risa was already moved by these odd words when, to her amazement, tears started down Jamey's cheeks. Teeth clattering, saying and hiding nothing, he just stood and let them fall. Jamey the non-crier. Jamey the tough guy. She didn't ask why. She suspected he couldn't yet say. But she saw at once what kind of weeping this was.

This was mute yearning. These were the tears of the broken open. Blue-lipped and bereft, laughably cold and Tinker-Toy-dicked, her love stood in the shower stall adoring his Romeo and his Mahatma Gandhi, loving his Romeo's tuba case and his father's worn snapshots of Debbie, loving Gandhi's love for Rama and Romeo's haunches on his hand and seventeen years of six-leggedness and Risa and Lilly and an invisible door.

And he was yearning and yearning because of all of this. Risa saw. She couldn't yet trust it, but she saw. "Romeo's *duh*-*duh*-door," whatever that was. The door's betrayal, whatever that was. She never forgot these two things.

Because Jamey never *was* the same afterward. He had joined Risa in what the Arabs call *al-hayrah*. He moved now, as she did, in perpetual astonishment round a point rationally incomprehensible yet endlessly desirable. A life of grief- love- and rage-driven refusal to ask Ultimate questions had been touched by an unasked-for hint of Answer.

The truth about You, Tukaram once said to his God, is in my own heart. How do You plan to get it out of there?

In Jamey's life, his God had answered, *Tk!*

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# Damage

by Wendell Berry

**I** I have a steep wooded hillside that I wanted to be able to pasture occasionally, but it had no permanent water supply.

About halfway to the top of the slope there is a narrow bench, on which I thought I could make a small pond. I hired a man with a bulldozer to dig one. He cleared away the trees and then formed the pond, cutting into the hill on the upper side, piling the loosened dirt in a curing earthwork on the lower.

The pond appeared to be a success. Before the bulldozer quit work, water had already begun to seep in. Soon there was enough to support a few head of stock. To heal the exposed ground, I fertilized it and sowed it with grass and clover.

We had an extremely wet fall and winter, with the usual freezing and thawing. The ground grew heavy with water, and soft. The earthwork slumped; a large slice of the woods floor on the upper side slipped down into the pond.

The trouble was the familiar one: too much power, too little knowledge. The fault was mine.

I *was* careful to get expert advice. But this only exemplifies what I already knew. No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place. If one's knowledge of one's whereabouts is insufficient, if one's judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use.



## II

In general, I have used my farm carefully. It could be said, I think, that I have improved it more than I have damaged it.

My aim has been to go against its history and to repair the damage of other people. But now a part of its damage is my own.

The pond was a modest piece of work, and so the damage is not extensive. In the course of time and nature it will heal.

And yet there *is* damage—to my place, and to me. I have carried out, before my own eyes and against my intention, a part of the modern tragedy: I have made a lasting flaw in the face of the earth, for no lasting good.

Until that wound in the hillside, my place, is healed, there will be something impaired in my mind. My peace is damaged. I will not be able to forget it.

## III

It used to be that I could think of art as a refuge from such troubles. From the imperfections of life, one could take refuge in the perfections of art. One could read a good poem—or better, write one.

Art was what was truly permanent, therefore what truly mattered. The rest was “but a spume that plays / Upon a ghostly paradigm of things.”

I am no longer able to think that way. That is because I now live in my subject. My subject is my place in the world, and I live in my place.

Continued on page 18



Continued from page 17

There is a sense in which I no longer "go to work." If I live in my place, which is my subject, then I am "at" my work even when I am not working. It is "my" work because I cannot escape it.

If I live in my subject, then writing about it cannot "free" me of it or "get it out of my system." When I am finished writing, I can only return to what I have been writing about.

While I have been writing about it, time will have changed it. Over longer stretches of time, *I* will change it. Ultimately, it will be changed by what I write, inasmuch as I, who change my subject, am changed by what I write about it.

If I have damaged my subject, then I have damaged my art. What aspired to be whole has met damage face to face, and has come away wounded. And so it loses interest both in the anesthetic and in the pure esthetic.

It accepts the clarification of pain, and concerns itself with healing. It cultivates the scar that is the course of time and nature over damage: the landmark and mindmark that is the notation of a limit.

To lose the scar of knowledge is to renew the wound.

An art that heals and protects its subject is a geography of scars.

#### IV

"You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough."



I used to think of Blake's sentence as a justification of youthful excess. By now I know that it describes the peculiar condemnation of our species. When the road of excess has reached the palace of wisdom it is a healed wound, a long scar.

Culture preserves the map and the records of past journeys so that no generation will permanently destroy the route.

The more local and settled the culture, the better it stays put, the less the damage. It is the foreigner whose road of excess leads to a desert.

Blake gives the just proportion or control in another proverb: "No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings." Only when our acts are empowered with more than bodily strength do we need to think of limits.

It was no thought or word that called culture into being, but a tool or weapon. After the stone axe we needed song and story to remember innocence, to record effect—and so to describe the limits, to say what can be done without damage.

The use only of our bodies for work or love or pleasure, or even for combat, sets us free again in the wilderness, and we exult.

But a man with a machine and inadequate culture—such as I was when I made my pond—is a pestilence. He shakes more than he can hold.

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## Most of All, the Quiet

By Susan Marsh

All photos pages 20-24 Abby Berenbak



On a mid-summer day in Yellowstone National Park all I could see from the back of the twelve-passenger van were row after row of parked cars. We made slow-motion circles around the lanes as if on a carnival ride losing power, its orbit in decay along with our hopes of ever finding a free space. There must have been a thousand vehicles baking on the hot asphalt at Mammoth Hot Springs and four times that number of people milling on the boardwalks beyond. The workshop that brought me to Yellowstone that year was titled "Finding Your Voice," but at that moment I was sure I wouldn't be able to find my breath.

The travertine terraces of Mammoth Hot Springs gleamed like a cave turned inside out, limp stalactites hanging over the edges in dripping, twisted rags. Dead pines cast skeletal lines across the bone-white swells of stone, offering no shade from the ninety-degree heat. Venturing out there on that August afternoon was beyond consideration. It would have been like walking down the handle of a skillet.

The air-conditioned Yellowstone Institute van was a cool capsule of quiet, but when we finally found a parking slip we joined a national-park parody: stifling heat, jostling crowds, kids with ice cream dribbling down their chins. A baby's cries were drowned by the rattle of a garbage truck lifting a bear-resistant dumpster while an errant car alarm bayed urgently—*beep-beep-beep!* The bass line trailing from a convertible coupe replied: *boom-boom-boom!* The garbage truck emptied and dropped the

dumpster. *Bang-bang-bang!* Cars stood idle with windows open and radios cranked up. A father shouted orders to his brood as he lined them out for a photo in front of the terraces. Another car alarm began to bleat, this one punctuated with wild whoops and siren bursts. Irony floated like an overheard joke: this was a national park, the nation's flagship no less, two million acres of wilderness in the far corner of Wyoming. Visitors came for wildlife, scenery and memorable outdoor experiences, but most of what lay in front of me at the Mammoth Hot Springs parking lot could have been replicated in front of a suburban Wal-Mart.

Yet the people strolling the boardwalks seemed to be enjoying themselves. A shorts-clad tourist showed no perturbation from bumping elbows as he panned the terraces with a video camera. Young men crowded around an idling diesel pickup and agreeably shouted into the driver's open window and at each other. The noise and crowds of Yellowstone on a summer afternoon were as indisputable as the heat, to be endured with good humor. I lectured myself against intolerance. People were enjoying their national park, and I should have been glad, however noisy the result. I should have been content to know that attractions like Mammoth and Old Faithful drew most of the people and kept them entertained so solitude-seekers could still find quiet in less-traveled zones. I knew there were places where I could get away.

*"Irony floated like an overheard joke: this was a national park, the nation's flagship no less, two million acres of wilderness in the far corner of Wyoming."*



But getting away was not as easy as it used to be. Noise had a way of tagging along, a background hum so ubiquitous that the lack of it seemed eerie, causing people to pause and wonder what was missing. I ceded the group of youths their right to enjoy shouting over the pickup's roar if that was what they wanted to do, but something about their easy acceptance of it bothered me. Why didn't it occur to the driver to park the truck and shut it off so he could speak in the tones of normal conversation?

The day before, Deborah, our guide and workshop leader, told us about a "secret quiet place" she knew at Mammoth. No one believed this could be possible, and half of us argued for skipping the hour-long drive and holing up in the Lamar Valley where we could write in comparative isolation. Outvoted, I fell into line with my fellow students and tried not to be annoyed with Deborah for hauling us off to Bedlam.

We followed the trace of an abandoned railroad grade into a stand of Douglas firs. The only sign that a narrow-gauge railroad had once delivered tourists to the upper terraces at Mammoth was a grassy bevel in the hillside, now a faint trail. Littered with deer pellets and fallen pinecones, it led apparently nowhere. But nowhere sounded like a great place to go, away from the teeming boardwalks and parking lots and roads. Slowly we lost the sound of RVs chugging up the grade toward Obsidian Cliff, the next attraction along the way toward Norris Geyser Basin, and before I was fully aware of it our group of twelve was alone. Beside us lay a brass-stained terrace, a pool that gently simmered like a pot of stew. It was twenty degrees cooler under the trees than in the parking lot and the sweet, spicy scent of sun striking the boughs of Douglas fir filled the air. It took all of ten minutes to get away from the crowds.

The quiet, how it blessed me.

Quiet has become a rare sacrament, one we used to take for granted. Quiet, by its nature, slips away unnoticed. But once it's gone, we notice. In Yellowstone, the controversy over snowmobiles is largely about noise. At Grand Canyon the debate surrounding scenic flyovers is about noise. Noise, or the more recent bureaucratic substitute "excessive sound," only makes the list of Threats to the National Parks when decibels begin to cause physical damage to human eardrums. Compared to ecological calamities such as the replacement of native plants by alien weeds, the pollution of pristine lakes, and the brown haze that hovers over many national parks and

*"Quiet, by its nature, slips away unnoticed. But when it's gone, we notice."*

forests, noise is considered a lesser evil—a matter of aesthetics. And not without reason—the threats to parks are many and we are doing triage. If I had to choose between securing quiet for myself and survival for the grizzly bear, I'd go with the bear.

We shouldn't have to make this kind of choice. We are fond of saying the national parks are sacred, but we don't always act as if we believe it. In recent years the state of our national parks has taken a backseat to more pressing concerns like health care and homeland security and what the Dow is doing. Our relationship with these public wild lands has become abstract, intermittent, and removed from our daily concerns—while the priceless refuge they offer from the harrying distractions of our lives is increasingly at risk. We appreciate the wild in coffee table books and National Geographic specials on public television, or we sign up for packaged vacations guaranteed to deliver "memorable outdoor experiences" – including a five-star hotel room and chilled Chardonnay. We've grown to accept, or even expect, a theme park rather than the wild. Without authentic and individual experience, without the practiced intimacy needed to grow a personal relationship with real places, we cannot muster the visceral allegiance to them that is so urgently needed. I worry that the lack of intimate knowledge of the outdoors and its attendant quiet will make us simply forget about it. The quiet will go the way of the Dodo, unnoticed and not mourned.

...

We assembled around Deborah, conceding that she'd been right about this secret quiet place. Her pale eyes flashed merrily as she prepared us for an afternoon of solo time. Most of us were already scanning the deer trails that led in all directions, eager to start filling the pages in our notebooks.

"See you back here at four o'clock," she said. She glanced at her watch, tossed a long silver braid over her shoulder, and strode away.

We dispersed, off to find our voices. Deborah claimed a patch of fawn-colored sand where she sat cross-legged in baggy purple pants, her pencil



scratching purposefully across the page. I selected a direction and wandered until I was drawn to a shaded rock outcrop, a bald dome of charcoal-gray rising like a fossil eggshell from a stand of stunted lodgepole pine. There a spring exhaled the odor of hydrogen sulfide and a head-high lobe of travertine wrapped the clearing with stone the color of living flesh. I pressed my hand against the firm young rock and felt it pushing back. The quiet and containment there enveloped me, as though I'd walked into a private room and closed the door.

Sheets of water flowed from the lip of the terrace and plinked onto an entablature of hollow stone. The hot spring breathed and sputtered, gargled and sang. Before I started to write anything, I sat and listened.

Our class had spent the previous afternoon in an exercise of listening. Blindfolded, our eyesight voluntarily eclipsed, we practiced unaccustomed ways of seeing. We learned how hard it was to tell the whisper of a creek from the sigh of wind in the trees, and how important it was to know the difference to avoid getting lost or wet. At the end of the day, we gladly yanked off our blindfolds. One member of the group exclaimed, "I can't imagine

being blind in Yellowstone. There is so much to see!"

Now at the secret place that Deborah called Narrow Gauge in honor of the long-gone railway route, I closed my eyes and imagined being blind in Yellowstone. It didn't seem so bad. I plugged my senses into the current of rich and varied scents, the freshness of the air. And most of all, the quiet.

Sightlessness can be a brief vacation from habitual watching, eyes always on the distant, the next-to-come. Far vistas pull our thoughts ahead as we wait for tomorrow and plan what we'll do next. Our culture praises this trait—we call it vision. But it is also a distraction. For a few minutes at Narrow Gauge my vision was suspended in favor of the here and now, where sun poured warmth onto my arm and shade cast by a heavy branch lay cool across my chest. Eyes closed, I noticed the difference. Sulfur fumes gathered and dispersed, and I registered their changing intensity. A red-breasted nuthatch called, a soft alto monotone. *Beep-beep-beep*—for a moment it reminded me of that cursed car alarm, but unlike the alarm the bird's call was gentle and soothing, a natural sound belonging to that place. A hundred feet away I would not have heard it at all.

Quiet invaded my chest, and my breathing matched the cadence of the nuthatch call, the water's plink, the inhale-exhale of wind moving through the trees. I wasn't used to such peace, and the contrary part of my brain immediately kicked in, distracting me with an internal clamor that rivaled that of the parking lot. I thought first of the bleating car alarm, evoked by the nuthatch, and of all the car alarms that added to the cacophony of downtown Jackson Hole in the summer. I thought about the tourists milling on the far side of the woods and wondered over the fact that no one else had found this sheltered place.

I think that even if people knew about it they wouldn't come, for there was no marked trail or safety-standard

boardwalk and it certainly wasn't among the park's main attractions. The people I saw on the Mammoth boardwalks inched along in tight clusters while gripping their children's arms with firm hands and stared into ice-blue pools hot enough to peel away their skin. It was a good thing they stuck to the developed attractions designed to accommodate them, that they didn't go running madcap over

*"Sightlessness can be a brief vacation from habitual watching, eyes always on the distant, the next-to-come."*





brittle crusts of travertine only to fall through and scald their toes. But a thought struck me: were they missing something sublime here?

This thought led to a remembered visit from an old Seattle friend when I lived outside of Bozeman, Montana in the early 1980s. When I asked how she'd slept she shook her head.

"Lousy," she said. "It was too quiet."

She must have felt that disorienting absence of the familiar—even if it consisted of freeway traffic and sirens and garbage trucks at four in the morning. Reassuring sounds, like a wind-up clock ticking in a new puppy's bed. At my house, where the untreated water came cold and sweet from an eighty-foot well and I could step off the deck at night and see the Milky Way (or step off at noon in the buff and know I would go unseen), the quiet must have felt to my friend like the inside of a closed coffin.

Giving my thoughts a gentle shove back to the immediate moment in Yellowstone, I recalled a recent weekend spent in a campground full of RVs. At dinnertime a chorus of diesel generators drowned out a nearby waterfall, but at ten o'clock when quiet hours began the last of them sputtered into silence. The tent campers all stood up and applauded. The wild returned and hovered close, opening our senses like night-blooming flowers. We glimpsed the world our ancestors knew, mysterious and vast. That edge of fear, exhilaration. The hidden waterfall plunged in the darkness. Somewhere in the distance a coyote found its voice.

Back at Narrow Gauge, I opened my eyes and picked up my pen and lay line after line over the page as the memories kept coming, all of them having to do with noise or places where I used to get away.

...

When I was growing up, trips to the mountains taught me a quiet that I measured by my ability to stand on a ridge and hear the small white sound of a river in the valley far below. A raven's hoarse report, swallowed by a vast and intimidating silence, a silence that thrilled me. At home near Sea-Tac airport, I sprawled on the back lawn with a book and jammed my fingers into my ears every few minutes as a jet shrieked overhead. The airport grew and the jets grew louder and the country roads swelled into busy thoroughfares. By the time I was in high school I was antsy for escape. Few of my neighbors seemed to miss the vanishing quiet as they howled at the inanities of *Laugh-in*, hacked gas-

powered mowers through the dirt clods in their lawns, and adjusted without comment to the constant drone that drifted from the newly built freeway. No one seemed to wonder where the quiet had gone, and true to its nature, it slipped away unnoticed.

On a trip home to Washington with my husband years later, we stopped at a state park on the east slope of the Cascades where my family used to camp. The lake I remembered was tucked into a lacey forest of ponderosa pine, where people pitched vast Army surplus canvas tents and rowed across the lake to fish the deep water under a cliff of solemn gray. The lake I remembered smelled of trees and sunlight, sweet as a rich dessert, a place where we collected pinecones and wandered barefoot on mats of fallen needles. The only sounds were squirrels chattering, water lapping at the lakeshore, and the occasional hollow bang of an oar against a wooden gunwale in the blue dusk.

"It's a beautiful spot," I promised Don. "You'll love it."

The parking lot overflowed with RVs the size of busses and pickup trucks hauling boats of every size and shape. Car stereos blared. *Beep-beep-beep, boom-boom-boom*. The water churned with the crossing wakes of Sea Squirrels, Jet-skis, and what looked to me like miniature hydroplanes. A fisherman of my father's generation would have been left rocking in his rowboat, bewildered. Pickups without mufflers turned tight loops in the parking lot, mimicking the paths of the boats on the water below. Noise echoed through the trees and washed against the gray cliff on the far side of the lake.

I looked for something recognizable—a pinecone on the ground, a footpath leading into shadows. Perhaps I had the wrong lake. Could this be the place where my father once stood, cleaning trout in his red plaid swimming trunks while my mother sat at the picnic table and painted her toenails frost pink? I turned to Don. "Let's get out of here."

"It's too bad," he said. Trying to be helpful, he added, "The lake I used to go in the Adirondacks is the same way."

...

I'm no ultra-sensitive aesthete, disturbed by every sound. I see the way others jump at a sudden horn blare or barking dog, the way they wince and pause in conversation on a street corner as a noisy vehicle goes by. But we expect noise on the street, not in a national park. In the city we go indoors to escape



the noise, and perhaps this is what bothers me the most—for most of us the only escape is to retreat behind the door, shutting out the world instead of joining it. Missing out on the world of soothing natural sounds, the breeze in a stand of firs, a nuthatch calling—the kinds of sounds recorded for those relaxation tapes. Something feels amiss when I have to go indoors and close the windows and listen to a tape of seagulls and waves in order to relax. I want to go to a real beach and listen to real seagulls and waves. Everybody ought to have that opportunity.

Even in places like Jackson Hole the quiet is increasingly hard to come by. After years of grumbling by valley residents and mountain trekkers, the noise from the Jackson Hole airport finally made the local newspaper's front page. Not because the hikers were being heard at last; rather, the increase in loud private jets had started to annoy residents of the high-end subdivisions immediately south of the airport. One woman quoted in the paper complained that the low-level over-flights kept her from concentrating on her golf. Well, I thought, let the golfers have a go at the noise issue. Perhaps, unlike the hikers, they would prevail.

Because the Jackson Hole airport lies within Grand Teton National Park, the lease agreement with the Park Service requires noise abatement where possible. Noise-mitigating flight paths and take-off schedules have been in place for some time, but they apply only to commercial air traffic, and neither the airport board nor the FAA have much to say about the proliferation of private jets that has pushed the average number of flights per day to over one hundred thirty.



*“Like granite boulders in a current they made themselves felt, resisting threats to what we all loved.”*

The clamor of air traffic has become an ongoing story as more people arrive at resorts and vacation homes via private jets and take in the scenery by helicopter. But the timing of this particular news

article struck me, for that morning in the summer of 2002 I had joined a gathering in a meadow at the Murie Center, a place dedicated to exploring wild nature and the human spirit. Located in Grand Teton National Park, the center is named for the people who once lived at the historic ranch, biologists and brothers Adolph and Olaus Murie. The Muries once sat with friends in conversation similar to the one I joined that day, discussing the same kinds of things—how to protect our precious heritage of wildlife, natural beauty, and quiet. Leading our discussion in 2002 was the distinguished biologist and director of the international Wildlife

Conservation Society, George Schaller.

The conversation was repeatedly interrupted by bursts of racket generated by the airport a few miles away. On several occasions Dr. Schaller stopped speaking and waited as another

plane passed over. The noise was distracting but it also provided the perfect counterpoint to what we were talking about. What Dr. Schaller kept returning to, between forced pauses, was this: we must set aside discouragement and continue speaking up for what we love.

“It’s easy to get discouraged,” he said, “if you set out to save the world. But pockets of hope exist where people work locally, for the long term, on issues they are passionate about.”



Issues such as those raised by the Jackson Hole Airport, whose runways had displaced moose and antelope and sage grouse; whose noise could be heard throughout the valley and along the mountain trails; whose presence reminded us of how blithely we consumed irreplaceable resources for pursuits that went far beyond need. Some long-time members of the Jackson Hole community had for years been advocates for airport restrictions and noise abatement. Like granite boulders in a current they made themselves felt, resisting threats to what we all loved, holding official feet to the fire and demanding a place for wildlife, serenity, and even golfers trying to concentrate on their games. Because of them, the various entities responsible for airport management have become more serious in seeking ways to reduce the noise.

*"Quiet, the precious quality of our time."*

My pen stopped moving and I laid aside my notebook. Perhaps it was time to close my eyes again, for instead of enjoying the afternoon of quiet I was getting myself worked up, recalling angry letters to the *Jackson Hole News* and replaying every harsh and unwelcome noise I could remember, reliving the experience of a girl running away from the jets approaching to land at Sea-Tac Airport, their down-swept wings like angry frowns in the sky. The memories bubbled up like a hot spring and burst among the branches of the pines.

Minutes passed, and I heard only the musical tones of water drops splashing on travertine. The breeze died, the nuthatch flitted away. Before I knew it, the airplanes and motorboats had retreated and there was no memory of noise, no expectation of noise to come, only the present moment, infused by the quiet at Narrow Gauge. A rare stillness of mind ventured forward, like a doe stepping into the open to shake after a summer rain.

"Let's share a little of what we did today," Deborah suggested when we reassembled. "There's no hurry to go."

We sat in a sleepy circle and passed around sketchbooks and objects we had found—bits of fruit-rind agate and transparent travertine, a lime-encrusted pinecone.

Deborah shared a few lines that would later coalesce into a poem:

I am the wind  
Sweeping the surface of a pool,  
I am the ribbon of steam  
Gusting skyward,  
I am the lazy tendril  
Drifting down a scalloped terrace.

Cinda recalled her adolescence in a voice barely above a whisper. "Wildness," she read. "A woman gone mad. Once I thought myself daring. Now I call it stupid. The bliss was extraordinary, beyond what I feel now."

We leaned forward and held our breaths, waiting for what she would say next. Her eyes shone as she looked up from her notebook. "I felt it again," she said. "The wildness, after this, today."

My turn. I flipped through the pages in my notebook and glanced over the lame and clumsy words, most of them crossed out. "I don't have anything to read," I said. "I spent the whole time thinking about airplanes and motorboats and worrying that pretty soon there will be no place left to find any quiet."

"Same here," someone said.

"Me too."

"What can we do?"

People sat thoughtfully, echoing each other, nodding in agreement, and then Deborah grabbed the reins.

"Well then, what *shall* we do?" she reiterated, "This is a truth we need to put out there, how should we go about it? What can each of us do to help preserve the quiet?"

We slowly went around the circle, offering ideas. A letter to the Park Service, another to the editorial page. One to the manufacturers of diesel pickups. Whatever was offered was given in a gentle voice, each spoken word blending into song. The words and voices repeated a blessing, the gift of quiet we would carry with us when we left. Quiet, the precious commodity of our time. We resolved to search for it, defend it, and never let it slip away unnoticed.

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photo essay

# “For Seasons One Year”

Photos by Chris Chapman

Text by James Chapman



It was in the Spring that I met you,  
the second time.

Leaves were peaking  
and stars, months of grey had finally retreated behind the mountain  
a veil, a mirror in the lake  
so green and too  
was I, out to see you bashfully.

I close my eyes to sleep, your words were orange  
long winks of lashing sunsets, the finally warm,  
the season when the budding Sun remembers us all.

In the spring I met you, the second time.

There is always a false rise, and a missing sorrow,  
the grey takes hold one more lingering moment,  
contrasting from pool of black and white mountain peaks.

From the peaks we see ashes rising above the clouds,  
pray to time to stand still.

The snow is too suddenly gone, the love of winter's gravity fading.





The season of the Sun comes quickly. The greens grow into the river; the grasses quickly taller; the earth shrinks smaller under so much scrutiny and light. In the summer too, we walked along in grass foothills, foot paths ancient in bedrock, a day is like a thousand years, together two, carrying our lives from the plains into the mountains, eating fish along the way, sustained by snow melting further into the rocks, laughing at the sheer vastness, the lunatic beauty, small green growing mosses. I am color-blinded by it. We have left the town long behind.





Notice, for so long the heat, the sheer dryness. The desert in the highland and vanilla Ponderosa that lace the edges. Notice, I for only so long, my weary legs, in snow and out again, these mountains and their valleys as summers pass, and winter and summer again. Repeat. Only when I am alone do I notice the vast changes. Walking alone we see it together. I note the words of the explorer, his accent altered British in my particular recollection:



"The first great thing is to find yourself, and for that you need solitude and contemplation, at least sometimes. I tell you deliverance will not come from the rushing, noisy centers of civilization. It will come from the lonely places! The great reformers in history have come from the wilderness."



Stars whirling in my head, flames like arrows from the heavens, forty days and forty nights, draw slowly, creep in moments between autumn butterflies and dying bees. The plains go on slowly beneath me, echoed and hollow, yet a texture of the inevitable life. In the evenings I tread, try to drink away my memory, try to push on until winter when I can leave this place and return under the veil.





*For our dog Caleb*

Yes, everything is going wonderfully, and then something stumbled, I nearly twisted my ankle, and looked up to see you limping silently, my friend, your eyes were long on this seventh season. Time has suddenly passed and we are old together, my hands wrinkled. I see your need and we sit, watch the wind grow around us, holding still a laugh. A sea storm on the high desert-dried grasses, we sit, you rest your head near mine, there is nothing more than to watch as you fade into the growing autumn light, your hair golden with the late sun, fading deeper into it. I am forced to get up and go alone as I watch the imminent Cloud of Inevitability draw near, reaching first for you. Like a flaming chariot it carries you into the heavens and chases me to the mountains.







Then in a moment, silence, I awake to a world of white and blanket covering you deep in the snow. We have already entered the white lodge, my friend. I will return to town without you walking beside me...



# A Lament for the Living

By Katie Yale

*For A.*

Today I torture myself with the thought of your death—  
That is to say, what my days would be like without you.  
Maybe I do this because I have spent all my ideas,  
Or because I have already forgotten the dreams of last night.

I picture myself walking the woods in early spring,  
With the mud and the bones. It's Montana, because of the mountains  
And because those are the woods I know best. I have gone there for solace—  
To watch the trillium, dark as Merlot, poke through the dirty snow.  
But it's too early, and I cannot find a single pale stem.

First I think of you, the time we drove through the desert,  
Choking down mustard sandwiches because *there wasn't any money*.  
I think of how that heat held me low, how the air felt too thin  
To breathe and I dreamed of water every night, scratching  
Long white streaks across my skin.  
I think too, about how you loved every minute in that fierce sun.

Then I imagine the winters of our home. Of rearranging furniture  
During snowstorms, gouging lines in the dark wood floors  
Struggling with the china cabinet, clinking blue glasses like thin bells.  
And how we danced, that ridiculous stomp, arms in a whirlwind—  
The music too loud, the room too square for the drums of Brazil.  
And I laugh in small gulps of air, and picture you  
Wearing three pairs of socks just to stay warm, looking out  
The big bay window, down to the frozen waves on the frozen lake.



Then I imagine you walking beside me, a ghost or spirit—  
Past the large tabletop stump, past the snarl of wood  
That looks like a dancing alligator. But there is too much pain,  
So I bury you deep in the thick rushes I pass.

I stop at an old snag, and start filling the woodpecker holes  
With needles and moss and dirt, scraping my knuckles on the bark.  
Then there is a moment when I think I'll die too, when my breath is ragged,  
And my teeth hurt and my hands and my heart.

Then nothing—I stare into the sun, the white antiseptic light  
Burning my eyes. Or no, maybe it's cloudy, yes, it's raining,  
And I sit with my back against that dead tree—  
Rain slapping my neck and sliding off the end of my nose,  
Until I am in a great puddle and have forgotten how to stand.



# In the Neighborhood of Wolves

By Robin Patten

The light of the moon fell across the valley, drawing dark lines across the white pastures: moonshadows streaking from mountains, trees, and each small brown blade of grass that still stood above the snow. The Gallatin River ran through the valley, the muted sound of its water escaping from breaks in the thick ice to burble up and send river voices into the night. It was almost exactly midnight on New Year's Eve, 2000.

The wolves were howling.

Not far from that flowing river, twenty-six family members had come together at my family's ranch, a small holding nestled in the mountains of southern Montana. No longer a working ranch, this piece of land is a gathering point on occasions of celebration. As the year drew to a close, our family, knit together by place, loudly laughed and sang and shared memories of the past, toasting to the years ahead. Outside the dark windows, the silent landscape served as a testament to the bond of the earth, a bond that had united our family for decades. Because of the many young children present, we decided to declare New Year at Central Time, meaning that midnight was actually still an hour away as everyone put on their coats to return to their respective houses and warm beds.

"I'm going down the road to the river. Come with me?" my brother asked, his big frame filling the door as he made his way out, the bulk increased by his heavy Carhart jacket. The question made me smile. My brother is a rather quiet person and, being separated by eight years, we have always been close but with a somewhat hidden affection.

I smiled. "It's cold out there." I gave him an out.

"Let's go," he replied.

I put on my jacket.

After the chaos of the night's celebration, the quiet of the night was soothing, the biting cold refreshing. The landscape

was milky-bright with moonlight. Few words were exchanged on the way down the road, just enough conversation to establish a warm sibling connection. We stood in silence where the road met the river, side by side on the old bridge that Grandpa built fifty years ago, accompanied only by the river's faint voice.

"Listen." I grabbed my brother's arm.

"What?"

"The wolves."

There, so faint that even the murmur of water almost hid the sound, came the howling. A deep howl, rising in a crescendo that did not break into earnest coyote-yips. A single song, then a chorus.

There on that bridge with the moonlight flooding the mountains and the clear winter air carrying the crystal notes of the wild down the valley, the wolves sang to the sky and the new millennium began.

My brother lifted his whiskered face to the moon, raised his arms to the night sky and simply whispered "Yes."

This is their home now, the wolves. Not that they weren't here before, but after their reintroduction in 1995, they have made their presence known. Usually it is just a distant howl or huge tracks



All photos pages 34-37 Bill Rideg



crossing the pasture where the horses stand grazing, apparently undisturbed. Sometimes it's the sight of one or two passing across the hillside. Occasionally, it is close encounters.

The wolves were eradicated from this area in the early 1900's. By 1936 they were considered essentially extinct in the Yellowstone ecosystem. Now these reintroduced wolves are perceived as newcomers, and newcomers are not always welcome. Wolves are blamed for a decline in the elk herd. Wolves are killed when they eat cattle and cursed for the isolated cases of attacking dogs. Wolves are embroiled in controversy, even as the state and federal governments wrestle with how to regulate their existence.

But here in this valley wolves have become part of the community dance, in step with the elk, coyotes, and moose. Their presence is no different than that of other predators whose home this is, like the grizzly or the elusive mountain lions. For in this place, where no cattle are run and no hunting is done, there is no competition between man and beast. Here it is possible to embrace the wolves as simply another component of a complex system.

I have spent years in this valley, watching the dance, occasionally even taking part in it. I have witnessed the coming of the wolves, and sometimes feel I am beginning to grasp how they fit in. Yet these big predators are not easy to observe, and I do not believe it is fully known how eradicating them changed this system, or how bringing them back will change things yet again. Through observations, notes in journals, long days of hiking, seasons of watching, it is possible to begin to understand the wolves' language. To speak it fluently is a gift.

I became an ecologist in a quest to refine my understanding of the wild community, to better comprehend the dance. Through years of academic training and three degrees, I learned about the principals of predator-prey interactions, about population dynamics and resource distributions. I know as a scientist that the big predators such as the wolves, bears, and mountain lions, are the least visible components of this ecosystem, their numbers fewer than the prey species as they hold their position at the top of the food pyramid. I also know as a long time observer of this land that sighting a predator goes beyond science. These animals invariably send an instinctual thrill through my bones, a stirring that is not quite fear, not quite comfort, but certainly wonder.

Not too long ago I was charged by a porcupine, a situation that could be considered comical, but was actually quite moving. That day, my dog started furiously barking at a log. On closer inspection I could see the mother porcupine curled up with her young, little spiky balls suckling at her teats. When I came too close, she came out in a porcupine charge, each quill upright and quivering, teeth bared, moving slower than I could have walked away. Her lumbering gait looked like a slow-motion bear charge.

The porcupine's determination was amazing. Her attempt at running me off, and her success in doing so, gave me a new respect for these animals, maybe more so for having witnessed her suckling her young. Thus it is with big animals and small, be it bears, wolves, or porcupines. Close encounters provide an insight into their character, their behavior, their life.

However, encountering a wolf carries a special impact. They have that bone-thrilling, soul-hitting, predator presence. The current situation of the wolves creates tension: big predators rapidly increasing in an area where human numbers are also increasing. I believe the most poignant of my wildlife encounters was with the wolves in the back pasture just last year, highlighting the conflict between human and nature, between management and wild. Two different languages. The encounter itself was more than memorable, and the ensuing events created a disturbance that still sends out ripples, a stone thrown into an inner pond.

It happened when the snow patches had melted down to where it was possible to venture up the valley, and I headed that way for the first time that year, reveling in the green leaves of the aspen, so bright and delicate in their youth. Watching the horizon, it was my peripheral vision that caught the





gray movement. Out from under a large Douglas fir, maybe a hundred yards off the trail, sprang a wolf, light gray and lean. Pacing, she watched me, warily but without fear. The hole she had emerged from had once been a coyote den. Was it now a wolf den?

I sat down to watch and see if she was alone, if she would run. By sitting I hoped to show her I meant no harm. There was no breeze to rustle the new aspen leaves, no sound at all on this early spring afternoon. The world shrank down to me, my dog, and a large gray wolf on the hillside.

The wolf, graceful yet anxious, paced back and forth, back and forth. It seemed best to leave her alone, as it appeared there must be pups in the hole beneath the tree. Standing to leave, I noticed that it was not only the gray female who was watching me. On the valley floor was a second wolf, a stone's throw below the den. It was obvious he was the male. His long legs and powerful body made the female seem small and less elegant. He was sleek, white hair almost silver, streaked with black. He was big.

"It is time to go, Emma" I said, waving at my dog to send her down the trail in front of me. Even as I turned, the wolf stood, leisurely stretched, and then made his move.

A wolf running at a lope moves quickly, stretching out those long legs and covering distance without effort. From where I stood it appeared he was racing at me in a manic charge. Thinking back, he was not charging, was not even aggressive. In his own way



**"...not a mile away, was a pair of wolves with three pups. And so I made my mistake. I told."**

he was just saying, "Get out, leave. This is my home, the home of my mate and my offspring, and you and your dog are not welcome."

Sometimes you just don't belong where you are. Emma, luckily, bolted. For my part, instinct dictates that it is best not to run in such a situation, but to stand tight and face the approaching animal. The very thought of running made my hamstrings sing, as if teeth were already sinking in. I too have been brought up on "Little Red Riding Hood" stories.

I faced him. And he stopped ten yards away, and simply looked at me. Looked at me with eyes that held no aggression, but sang with meaning. How often have I since claimed that I will call myself a poet when I can describe the eyes of a wolf seen from ten yards away.

In the end he watched me go, as I first backed down the trail, then walked, and eventually ran. He watched every step. Even as I entered the corral at the barn, the wolf was within sight, silhouetted against the sky on the crest of the last hill.

This was news. A wolf den in our back pasture. With all the researchers out and about, all the wolf watchers and backcountry recreationists, not even our family had known that there, not a mile away, was a pair of wolves with three pups. And so I made my mistake. I told.

On the other end of the line, the phone rang. "Hello?" It was John, a graduate student at the nearby University I had come to know and trust. He was studying the wolf pack that frequented this area, focusing his research on the interaction of wolves and elk. I had worked with him on projects with the local elementary school kids. John had been eager to share his knowledge with young people growing up in this area. His connection to the ecosystem seemed to go beyond the academic. We had several discussions about the role of the wolf in these parts. I liked John. I wanted him to know.

"John, promise me if I tell you something it won't turn into a circus."

"What?"

"There's a wolf den in our back pasture."

"No!" John said, disbelief in his voice. I told him my experience. Two days later he came up to the ranch, and we ventured out back, hiking up the ridge and using a spotting scope to peruse the hillside.

Mama wolf slept under a tree, laid out flat and not moving. Three black pups played nearby.

Through the scope their features were clear.

"Wow." It was all John said for a while, as we took turns watching the peaceful scene, the pups rolling over



each other, the mother occasionally looking up to check on them.

Then John brought up the fact that the ecologists at the University would probably want to dart the wolves and get a collar on them. He brought it up casually, as if that was just the way it was. With those words came a sickening sense of foreboding. What had I done?

What started as something beautiful became a bureaucratic battle between the University and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. It turned out there was competition between these entities to be the first to get a collar on this particular pack. In the many hours of phone conversations that followed, I sat and listened to various stories about who *really* should be collaring these wolves, who *really* should be darting them, trapping them, tracking them down. "It has become," said John, "truly a circus. I'm sorry."

Scientific research is necessary to better understand ecosystems. I am an ecologist after all. But I can't help feeling that perhaps it is good to have a small piece of land where the wildlife can live without interference and reside in their own community without humans messing with them. In the end our family made the decision to allow only non-intrusive research on the property, partly for the peace of the animals, and also because it appeared that the researchers felt that finding wolves on private land was a boon. Here was a place free of government rules and regulations.

Saturday morning came. The researchers called to let me know they would arrive in an hour, thinking the best chance of finding the wolves would be late morning after their daily hunt.

One hour.

I put my running shoes on. I left Emma home. I went out back, careful not to step in the trail and leave a print that would show my passing. I sat down at the same spot where I had first seen the wolves. They were all there, peacefully settled in under that big Douglas fir, parents sleeping, pups playing. For awhile I sat and watched.

Then it ripped out of me, a yell, so foreign in the valley I had always quietly shared with the wildlife. In a cracking voice I let loose, "Leave! Leave now! Run! Be free! Goooo..." Fading into a lost whisper.

The wolf eyes turned on me, stared at me. Then



**"The wolf eyes turned on me, stared at me."**

the big gray animals were up the hill into the woods and gone. The pups tucked into the den.

The researchers never saw those wolves again. They used dying wildebeest calls and hamburger to lure them out, but never a sign. They attributed the wolves' disappearance to the fact that after a few months a wolf den becomes too full of fleas and detritus to be healthy and the wolves move on. It is true, that does happen. But I would like to believe something else.

I never told anyone the whole story of what happened that Saturday morning, never admitted my actions. Until now. This was a rare event, but the choices it presented were perhaps not so rare.

Almost two weeks later I walked out back to visit the den site, looking for solace and understanding. Movement in the woods stopped me. Wolf eyes. The female was there, her eyes again holding a strong message.

It is not clear why she had come back. Apparently wolves do revisit their dens. I never saw her again after that. Someday, perhaps, I will understand. I am learning.

Here are the predators and their prey. Here are the wolves, grizzlies, mountain lions, and charging porcupines. Here on this small chunk of wild we coexist.

As my brother said so simply, his face lifted to the sky; "Yes."

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Sitting  
Under  
a  
Green  
Leaf  
Maple

by  
Peter  
Nash

I like to think  
That if I sat in the shade  
Of a green leaf maple  
Watching its shadow  
Move from west to east  
While the wind tossed the wild oats  
In rippling banners across yellow hills  
And the clouds flew through the air  
Like white galleons surging towards the Philip-  
pines  
And I remained so still  
That the chickadees clicking in the branches  
Cocked their black caps at me  
As if I were  
The top of an old oak stump  
Stuffed with acorns,

That if I sat here  
Watching the bear and the ladle  
And all the other dancers  
Twirl across the night sky  
Season after season  
And someone brought me  
Bacon and eggs for supper  
Covered my shoulders with a blanket  
From November to April  
And kissed me good night  
Each night—  
The grace of the world  
Would enter me.  
Though I'd be  
No great green tree  
From whose branches  
white birds sing  
hosannas,  
But an ancient horse  
All hide and bone  
Alone in a dusty  
pasture  
Feet splayed  
Bowing to the earth.





# The Peace of Wild Things

by  
Wendell  
Berry

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

*\*reprinted with permission of author*



Eugene Beckes



# "C o m m o n"

By Laura A. Munson

I know a woman who frequently finds hearts, in rocks, in the dish suds, in the shape of manure clods. She'll say, "Laura! Come here." And I'll know that I am about to see some mystical arrangement of two curves, cleavage and a point.

I know another woman who claims that whenever she begins a trip—in her car, on horseback, by foot, a hawk flies right across her path. "That's how I know we are going to be safe," she says.

I know a man who says that when he was a boy, his father told him that there was a magic place in the forest where there was a circle of trees. And if he could find it, and stand in the very center of the circle, he would get any wish he could dream up. So he was always walking around in the woods behind his house in northern California, in search of the Circle of Trees. He never found it. But now, as a man, in northwest Montana, he says that he cannot take a walk in the woods without coming upon a perfect circle of trees.

"Do your wishes come true?" I asked him.

"I've never made a wish there, actually. I just figure that the circle is, in itself, the proof that wishes can come true."

I knew a girl when I was young, who was on the lookout for stones with perfect rings around them. "They're good luck," she'd say, squatting on the banks of Trout Lake in northern Wisconsin. She would pick them up faster than it took for me to imagine how a ring in a rock could have power; never mind believe in it. I wanted to believe—her bucket filling up with all that potential luck.

"What's yours?" she asked once. "What's your charm?"

"I don't know." But I did know. I just didn't want to admit it out loud.

For a while I pretended it was blue sea glass. On the beach of Lake Michigan. Green, white, and amber were abundant. Blue was hard to find. But not for me. Then someone said, "Do you know what that is? It's broken glass. It's litter. Pollution. How can you find that beautiful?" So I stopped

looking. Still, on beaches, I find blue sea glass. Put it in my pocket. Don't tell anybody.

My daughter finds X's in the sky. From airplanes. "Look, Mama. Another X. Isn't it beeuuuuuuuuutiful?!" I don't tell her that it's exhaust from an airplane. Let her be delivered by her designs.

My husband finds faces in coals. Usually late-night, around a campfire. He stares, silent, in a knowing awe. I know what he is doing. I leave him to his faces. I have never seen them. He says I look too hard.

What's mine? I beg the coals. Is it really what I think it is? Shouldn't I be the sort to fetch a more extraordinary fetish? Hearts. Circles of trees. Faces in coals. Is it true—that mine...is the raven? Not a common crow, mind you. But a heft of glistening obsidian, flushing from the corner of my periphery—two, three times a day. Startling me. Interrupting me. Forcing a quick breath. Still, shouldn't I be more than interrupted by my "charm?" Shouldn't it inspire more awe? More wonder? More knowing? More breathing? More thanks?

"I still don't see your faces," I say to my husband—to the coals.

"Maybe you don't need to."

"Is that what it is—need?"

He is silent.

"I see ravens," I finally admit.

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing I guess. Just sort of...common."

He pokes a stick into the coals and orange sparks lift like fireflies. I see that he is smiling.

"What?"

"It's not what you see," he says. "It's that you see."

And as if by script, the sparks give way to audible winging. And I lift my head and see, in the night sky, the raven. I have not seen a raven in the night sky before.

"Thank you," I say, breathing deeply.

And I wonder: are these things offered? Or are they beckoned.



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